

Writing Essay Exams

1. Get a good night's sleep. Going into a test rested and alert will benefit you more than staying up all night cramming.
2. Budget your time. Look over the entire test before you begin. How many points is each question worth? Which ones will require the most time?
3. Read the directions carefully. Be alert to each professor's special requirements such as "write only on every other line", "write only on one side of the page", "use ink," or "define 10 of the following 15 terms."
4. Be sure you know what directional words in essay questions mean, such as compare, contrast, analyze, define, describe, explain, list, outline, summarize, trace, etc.
5. Neatness counts! Put yourself in the place of the professor who may have to read 100 test papers.
6. Be alert to grammar, spelling and punctuation errors. Don't let errors overshadow your knowledge of the subject.
7. Use all the time you are allotted to proofread your answers.
8. Before beginning to answer long essay questions, make a brief outline on your paper of the main points you want to include. If you run out of time, the professor will be able to see where you were going with your answer.
9. Begin your answer with a strong first sentence that shows you know the answer to the question. Then, go on to develop and support your points.
10. Remember that padding an answer will not improve it and may lower rather than raise your grade. The longer answer is not necessarily the better answer. Stick to the point!
11. If a question has several parts, make sure you answer every part you are required to answer.
12. If questions do not have to be answered in a specific order, answer the easiest one first. It can be a confidence builder and help you tackle more difficult questions.
13. If you feel you wrote good answers to the test questions but are disappointed when you get your test back, make an appointment to meet with your professor to go over the test. Ask for suggestions on how you could have written a better answer.

